

NEGRO SEASIDE SCHOOL.

AMERICAN MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION,
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A NEGRO SEASIDE SCHOOL.

BY

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Before the soldiers left the town, under the protection of the war boats and the fort across the harbor, schools were opened in Beaufort, N. C., and vicinity, for the swarms of freedmen that followed the army to the sea. Anxious to do everything that had been forbidden them in slavery, they rushed into the schools, the mass of them supposing that they could get "right smart" of learning in three months. Buildings which they had never entered except as servants, were given for their use, and Yankee teachers in day-school and night-school taught them books—and more. But as the soldiers left the place, and finally only a guard remained at Fort Macon, many of the freedmen went back to the plantations, or to other towns, and the schools outside the village were discontinued for want of pupils.

There were scant schools for all races in those days, and at last, in a few years, our Washburn Seminary was closed. The building (never owned by the Association) became a public hall for festivals and minstrel shows, and now and then was rented for two months for a *free* school,

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which meant, to parents and pupils, freedom to be present or absent ; and freedom to act as they liked when there.

Education went down to so low an ebb that at one time there was no school-book sold in the place but Webster's blue-back speller. The older people who had been in school soon after the war, could read, and owned their homes ; but there were many coming up to manhood and womanhood who could not read, were saving nothing from their wages, and, worst of all, the influences were such that they did not much mourn their loss. But some true hearts were praying for the good old times when their children could get some learning, and four years ago continued appeals to the American Missionary Association for the re-opening of a school there caused them to ask me to go there as principal.

Our town stands on a peninsula, three miles away from *anything* but water. Reaching the terminus of the railroad at a late hour, and the weather cold and stormy, a cheerless hotel housed me until morning. The landlord entertained me while at breakfast by telling me that Beaufort (which is a rival town) wasn't fit to live in, that I had much better stay that side of the harbor, etc. He tried to find out my business, but didn't.

A boarder gave me the information that the business part of the town had been burned the week before, and that the only person to whom I had a letter of introduction had moved away. A boat was found with a tiny cabin, in which two other strangers and myself could be sheltered from the wind, if we sat on the floor. I walked through Main street, and a man said, " Be you the new

teacher?" I secured a guide to the school-house, to find window-lights out, stove broken, and everywhere the wind having free access.

Monday morning came and the friends opened the school-house. A rough, low closet was brought for my table; dry-goods boxes mended the desks which were broken. A fire was built, and with a self-satisfied air I was asked if I could think of anything else that I needed. I mentioned a chair, a bell, a broom, and a water-pail. No doubt they thought it strange to ask for such luxuries, but they were found. There were nearly ninety grown scholars in the higher room, several of whom had not a book or slate—they hoped to look over with somebody else. When I assigned lessons, they sat up and studied aloud, and I found they knew no other way.

That was four years ago, when we first commenced. Now the building has passed into the hands of the Association, has been repaired, is good enough for the town, and is so comfortable that the scholars come in rainy or cold days, as to the warmest place they can find. After three years' use of the rooms not a pencil or chalk-mark can be found on desk or building, and should a knife be seen in use on the grounds, several alarmed youngsters would rush to headquarters, lest their precious school-house should be injured. From the crowd of noisy, untaught scholars, not always clean, have come a quiet company, who boast that *always* there is plenty of soap and water and big towels in "our school-house;" and their well-kept books testify to a frequent use of them.

The teaching had been so faulty that not one of the High School, at the time that the building was taken,

could explain long division, or thought that the reading in the arithmetic was of any use, or had ever seen a globe. Now we have classes of well-behaved boys and girls, who not only understand their lessons, but can tell other people about them ; who go with their fathers to the store and count up the prices of the purchases as quickly as clerks. The change is not in the school alone. The better class of people are so much better than they were four years ago, that some of the young folks are, as one woman said last week, "as different as if they were somebody else." Public sentiment is gaining on the side of right. Home after home, in our fishermen's village, is being bought ; or, if owned before, has been repaired. The comfort of the children has been planned for in their homes, that they may keep off the street. The one-roomed cabin is going, thus taking away the excuse so often pitifully given, when reproved for lounging on the street : "But, ma'am, I hasn't any place to stay at."

You may say, "Oh, well, these people are so easy to govern, and so ready to be taught, that there is no wonder such changes are made." There are some who suppose that the unsatisfied hunger for knowledge of past generations is condensed in the boys and girls of to-day. The average scholar is made after no such pattern. I have had pupils in Beaufort who would rather *fish* than go to school, and would much rather play marbles than do either. Is this discouraging? No ! It is a part of the teacher's work to show them that position, and true manhood and womanhood can be gained only by a Christian education ; and when they are convinced, they will persevere, and will endure hardships to get it.

One boy who, when young, would bury his books in the sand and play truant continually, entered our school last year and said, "I've thought it all out, and I see: the man who has an education gets good wages, and those that have no learning do the heavy work: I shall study." And study he does, in spite of the sneers that he is a dunce to go about with empty pockets in order to stay in the school. Last November he commenced in the first pages of the primer, and ended in May, having finished the third reader. He could do examples in written arithmetic and write a legible hand, besides being vastly improved in general appearance.

But some may ask, "Does it *pay* to wear one's self out, and grow grey with care? You can't save them all, anyway." It isn't likely that anyone else will help those that you are called to save, if you don't do it; and as to the pay, that depends on what you value. In Beaufort, I had been trying to make a pleasant yard and sidewalks out of a waste of sand, when a company of young men came and offered to help the workmen. Of course, I tried to show that I was grateful, but work pressed, the school was crowded, and I almost forgot. Some time after, when grass and flowers were upspringing, one of the least promising of the company was passing by, and I called his attention to the results of their work. Lifting his hat he said, "We were glad to do it; we'd be glad to do more, for you are the first person in this town that ever thought our set *could* do anything, or be anybody." And staunch friends they proved themselves. One was the first convert in our revival meetings; three are to study this year in more advanced schools. Some are, of

church workers, the very best. One young man wrote to his teacher, "You started me on the right way; you handed me over to God, and if any good is done by me the cause is yourself." Another scholar remarked, "I had given up going to school any more; I didn't see any way." But the start he gained in our noon-class is pushing him through one of our Southern colleges, and he promises to be good help for his people.

Strangers spending a few days in our town, and attending our services, said, "What do you do to your young folks that they behave so well? Your girls are modest and dressed in good taste, the boys are quiet and orderly; tell us what you do with them." I called at one of the homes where the mother was sick. She said she could not tell how they could have lived through the summer if her boy had not brought home his wages regularly; he, one year ago, showed no tendencies to help himself to anything good, to say nothing of helping anybody else.

The red blood rushed up to his face, and showed itself through his dark skin, as I told him afterwards how proud I was of what his mother had told me. This is some of the pay we get.

You are thinking the South *ought to educate those folks*, it is *their business*. That may be, but before you can make them see it, all the boys and girls that I know will be beyond the reach of uplifting influences. What I ask is that you will keep up your interest in the present generation, and if with it you can convince others that it is their duty to assist those that come after, well and good; but just now the King's business requireth too much haste to make it safe to stop long to discuss whose privi-

lege it ought to be to furnish the means to carry on this exigent work.

Some complain that we reach the cities, and leave the destitute regions. Come down to Carteret County, and see for yourselves if we do not have to go to the foundations of things there. If there is any place on the continent that needs education and the gospel more, I have not seen it.

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